

Family Feud – Resolving Conflicts

Grace for The Family

By Steve Viars

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ephesians 4:17-32

Preached On: Sunday, April 19, 2015

Faith Church

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

Website: <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

Online Sermons: <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

A few days ago CNN anchor Carol Costello wrote an op-ed piece entitled "Ready for the marriage apocalypse." She described a recent panel discussion she held at her alma mater, Kent State University, where she spoke to the journalism students there about politics and religion and marriage. She later wrote this, she said, "Their views on marriage intrigued me the most because, guess what? They don't care what your generation thinks, they'll get married if and when they want." Well, there you have it. Of course, as Cornelius Van Til from Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, my alma mater, used to say, "All facts are interpreted facts." Since Carol explains in this story that she chose to not get married until later in life and have a child on her own etc., that might have some impact on the story but the point is clear and certainly to a large degree accurate: plenty of young people are asking the question, "Why in the world would I ever want to get married?"

One young lady said this, "I didn't go to college for 4 years to be a mom. There is no housewife degree. I have worked my blank off for 4 years to get this degree, you want to use it. You want to be successful. You want to have that happy part of your life as well." She didn't elaborate on whether she was glad that position wasn't also taken by her own mom. Or how the categories she mentioned don't have to be mutually exclusive. Or that working an outside job outside the home isn't necessarily a happy place. Or that working inside the home raising your children is an unhappy one. But clearly, no interest in marriage or a family.

Another 21-year-old young lady named Jackie who was there said, "I'd have a very hard time justifying spending \$20,000 on a wedding when I could go to Europe." As if I needed anymore help fussing about how much people pay for their weddings. And Costello went on to say, "At first I thought Jackie was kidding so jokingly I responded, 'Wow, some people would say with that attitude you're undermining the moral foundation of this country.' Jackie didn't blink. 'But Europe,' she exclaimed, 'I'm really looking for a travel buddy. I don't think you need a wedding ring to prove that you love someone.'"

Costello goes on to explain why she believes many young people have come to this conclusion, in her words, "because so many have come from broken homes," as Carol did, "and haven't seen a marriage that ever worked so why would they step into a minefield that has already blown up so many of their family members and their friends?"

She concludes the article like this which brings me back to the idea of a pending marriage apocalypse, "Would it be so terrible if we all remained single?" By the way, Carol Costello is now married. I'm not sure how that particular statement would affect her dear hubby but, "Would it be so terrible if we all remained single?"

Now, as soon as I raise a question like this, I realize I need to throw out several caveats so let me put some balance on this and then explain where we're going this morning. 1. It's not the church's task to sit in judgment of the world. I realize I might be talking to some people who like Carol Costello more than you like me. I get that. I'm not raising this illustration to speak ill of Carol Costello or the young ladies that she interviewed, nor am I suggesting that we should be judgmental toward people involved in this trend in our culture. In fact, in the day and age in which we live, we probably need to bring ourselves back to this rather provocative passage on a fairly regular basis where Paul clarifies something that he had said earlier to the church at Corinth. He said, "I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother," in other words, a person who says he or she is a Christian and is, "an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler - not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges."

So my goal here is not to motivate any of us to look down on somebody else, that would just be contrary to Scripture for sure. Also we acknowledge that God gives the gift of singleness and we rejoice that we have such men and women in our church family. In discussing his own singleness during a time when the church was under increasing persecution, here's what Paul said about that, "I wish that all men were even as I myself am," namely unmarried. "However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I." Again, in that particular historical context of the church facing significant persecution. And later on in that chapter he goes on and explains his reasoning that oftentimes persons who are single have more time and energy to focus on serving Christ in their local church. That's what he says and we've certainly seen that to be the case here so whenever we talk about marriage, we definitely don't want to give the impression that one condition is better or more pleasing to God than another because that's simply not true.

Also this: the church is a place that welcomes and loves men and women who may have all sorts of familial brokenness in their past. Jesus said this in Matthew 11, he said, "Come to Me, all who are," what? "Weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Well, in this culture, often a person who said they were weary or who would say that they are heavy laden would tie that to something in their family so we have many people in our church family who have been divorced, some who have been divorced multiple times. We have widows and widowers for whom this whole subject of marriage is raw because of what

they're missing. In fact, when I went to get my morning cup of coffee at McDonald's, I was just standing there and a man came up to me who I had never met before but apparently knew me and he told me that his dear wife had just passed away within the last week or so and one of the comments he made to me was, "I'm really going to be lonely now." It impacted me powerfully standing there in line at McDonald's. Many in that situation in our church. Others from broken homes. Then there are those who are single but not necessarily because they want to be in that condition forever.

So what I'm saying and what I'm about to say about Carol Costello's article is hopefully understood in light of all those caveats. Now, come back to the main point. Here's the question: does this trend in culture, the coming marriage apocalypse where young people don't even want to be married, does that provide a marvelous opportunity for the church of Jesus Christ? Paul said it like this, "prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." Why? "Among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life," and I'm asking: is God calling us to be a group of people who if single are finding our joy and our satisfaction in Christ whether you plan to be in that condition for long or not? And if we're married, are people who are trying with the help of God to build marriages and families that would be so attractive that young people in this culture would say, "That is something that I would like to have and I really want to find out how"?

With that in mind, open your Bible, if you would now, to Ephesians 4. That's on page 152 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. While you're turning there, let me just ask you to be praying for me, if you would. I've been in California this week speaking at a pastor's conference there and trying to be an encouragement and a help to the pastors and their wives who are in that particular state fellowship. Also I'm happy to tell you, by the way, that my wife, Chris, just had her best week of health in the last 18 months and you can decide if those 2 data points fit together in any way, shape or form or not. I'm not sure what to make about that but that's why I'm leaving this afternoon for Albania and I'll be gone for the next couple of weeks. If everything works out, I'll wake up tomorrow in Istanbul, Turkey. Time will tell whether that's a good thing or not and then flying on tomorrow to Albania. Then the next several days are going to take me to a place about 3 1/2 hours from the capital to a seminary there. I'll have the opportunity to teach seminary students and pastors. Then later in the week, actually the reason I'm going, they're taking me to the coast where I'm going to speak at their Shepherd's Conference which is an annual event that they have for pastors and wives around the country. Then, Lord willing, on Sunday, back to the capital to speak at a church there and then the early part of the following week, speaking at a different seminary. Then hopefully coming home at the end of that second week and planning to be with you, Lord willing, 2 weeks from now to talk about those crazy kids of yours. That's the sermon. That's what we're planning to do and I'm looking forward to that.

Well, last week we began a series entitled "Grace for the family" which is part of our overall theme for this year, "Finding Grace," which is taken from this tremendous passage in Hebrews 4:16, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." I think many

of us would say this: if there is any area of our lives in need of grace, it's often where? In our families for sure. The notion that, well, the Christian home is just like everybody sitting on their little puff clouds and we just kind of nudge into each other like spools of Charmin would. It's just soft. It's light. It's easy. That's not anywhere near biblical. It's not anywhere near realistic or accurate. It's more like bumper cars. And because we all struggle with the curse of sin, we all do, huh? You didn't get that solved while I was in California, did you? I didn't think so. We all struggle with the curse of sin, we are in need of massive doses of grace. Of grace. But on the other hand, because of the finished work of Christ on the cross, what were we just singing about? Because of that wonderful cross, because for those who have acknowledged their sin and placed their faith and trust in Christ, we have access to the very throne of grace. We can face and overcome the challenges of family and married life in ways that are pleasing to God and delightful to us.

Well, one of the places where that premise is most tested is during a time of conflict. Have you had any of those recently in your family? How far back would you have to think before you could come up with one? In some cases, on the way to the church house this morning, huh? So we just thought we would address that head-on this morning. We're talking about what to do when there is a family feud. A family feud. Let's talk about resolving conflicts.

This is a marvelous chapter just brimming with important practical biblical truth. Let's jump in at verse 17 of chapter 4 and learn what we can about conflicts. Paul said, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart," wow. "And they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." Wow. "But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus," now note these next 3 verses carefully. A lot of truth here, "that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self," think about that regarding conflict, "which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind," think about this differently, "and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need."

Now, here is our key text for this morning, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth," I wonder what that means? I wonder what impact that has on conflicts? "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will," what? "Give grace." Think about that last conflict. "So that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God," uh-oh, I hope I didn't do that during a recent conflict. "By whom

you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Let's talk about family feuds, huh? Let's talk about resolving conflicts and I'd like to divide the rest of our time like this: let's think about the lens of conflict resolution and then the focus of conflict resolution and lastly the power of conflict resolution. So the lens and the focus and then the power. What's the lens? Well, the lens during a time of conflict ought to first and foremost be a sincere desire to change yourself. Just chew on that piece of hard candy for a minute, would you? That's one of the most important questions to ask as soon as the temperature starts rising in the home: what is my goal right now? And is this a goal that God can bless? That's why Paul said in Galatians 6:7, "Do not be deceived, God is not," what? "God is not mocked." In other words, if I have adopted the wrong goal during a time of conflict or any other time, I put myself in a position where I'm acting against the purposes and the plan and the will of God. If I have the wrong goal during a time of conflict, there is no way I can expect God to bless that hot mess. Why? Because God will not be mocked.

Well, what are some of the wrong goals that a person could adopt during a time of conflict? Here's one: it's winning at all costs. Is that the mode you go into? So they'll badger and berate and argue and threaten, whatever it takes to make that person say "uncle." There is no way this kind of an individual is ever going to admit any fault. There is no way they are going to listen carefully to the other person's concerns. There is no way they will look for appropriate compromise. They are going to win. They're just going to win. That is their goal any time a conflict arises. By the way, some Christian husbands act this way under the guise of being the leader of the home and this kind of man uses his strength and his supposed role to intimidate his wife which is why we tell wives around our church, "If you ever feel like your husband is intimidating you physically, throwing objects around, blocking your exit, not allowing you to feel safe in your own home, call the police and the deacons and your husband better pray that the police get there first." You see, whatever goal that is in conflict resolution, that's not pleasing to God.

Now, some go to the other extreme, the extreme of giving in because they just hate conflict. They don't like to communicate so they just agree to whatever the other person says to avoid an argument, to avoid a disagreement and the issue there is problems are never addressed. Problems are never solved. And generally that produces a low grade bitterness. Why? Because that anger is internalized and over time it begins to ferment and it becomes, as the writer of Hebrews says, "a root of bitterness springing up, causing trouble and by it many are defiled." That's why many young people don't want to be married today, it's because that's all they ever saw. By the way, this particular verse is directly connected to our annual theme. You say, "Well, how would that be?" Well, how does the verse begin? "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God." You see, when you adopt the goal of, "I'm going to win at any cost. I'm going to make this person say 'uncle,'" you've just forfeited the grace of God. Or when you give in, "We're not even going to try to solve this. We're not even going to try to communicate about the same thing," you forfeited the grace of God.

So winning at all costs is the wrong goal and giving in is the wrong goal and here's a third one: clamming up where the person says, "I just refuse to talk about it. I'm going to give you the cold shoulder. I'm going to give you the slow freeze. Everybody is going to know that I'm mad because of this drama queen thing that I have going on or this drama king thing I have going on but nothing is going to be discussed, nothing is going to be solved."

Well, a far better approach is to use this conflict first and foremost as an opportunity provided for you at the hand of a sovereign God. You believe that, by the way, don't you? You think the last conflict you had in your home was a surprise to God? Could I get a mm-mm on that that I could even hear from Faith West? The sovereignty of God fits into this conversation at some point intended to first and foremost reveal ways that you need to change. That means in conflict we have to choose the way of the new self.

Now, eventually we're going to get down to verse 29 and 30 but look at the context in verses 22, 23 and 24. These are crucial verses for every follower of Christ to know for a lot of reasons. What we have going on here is there is a contrast between the unsaved life in verse 22 and the saved life in verse 24. Let me read it again and look for the primary characteristic of the unsaved life and the saved or the believing life. Verse 22, "that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is," what? "Is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit." What does that mean? Well, it's oriented towards one's feelings. "Why did you do that?" "Well, I felt like it. I wanted to." Corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. "Why didn't you do what you were supposed to do?" "I didn't want to. I just didn't feel like it." That's the way an unbelieving person lives according to verse 22.

Now, look at the contrast in verse 24, "and put on the new self," the opposite, "which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Instead of living in a feeling oriented way, God wants us to live in a principle or a truth oriented way and from the only way you and I are going to handle family feuds well is if we choose to live by the principles of Scripture regardless of how we feel at the moment, otherwise what's likely to come out of our mouth is going to be very, very silly, right? If in your last conflict you were just going with whatever you felt like saying, going with whatever you felt like doing. How did that work out for you? Maybe you like this,

Game Show Host: 15 seconds please. During what months of pregnancy does a woman begin to look pregnant?

Contestant: September.

[Laughter]

During what month of pregnancy does a woman begin to look pregnant? I don't know a lot about that topic but if it's September, what I would encourage you ladies to do is to wait to get pregnant in October and then you'll never look pregnant during the entire

episode. Yeah, I would never want to go on that show, by the way. I know I would blurt out all sorts of craziness.

But here's the question now, seriously: is it possible that during a time of conflict you tend to function in a way that is more feeling oriented than principal or truth oriented? And if that's the case, what do you think you ought to do now? Well, I would recommend that you go to the throne of grace, huh? I would recommend that you ask God's forgiveness for that. Don't forfeit the grace of God that's available and acknowledge that to other people in your life and ask their forgiveness as well.

Now, what else about this focus? Identify areas of your life that need to change. I mean, let's face it, that's often the last thing on many of our minds during family feuds, right? Why? Because we're so focused on how the other person needs to change. In fact, we're not even listening to what they have to say, we are just building up our defense and the goal of the entire conversation is to help them see how they are wrong. In this passage, Paul gives a very important three-step process for change. Did you see it as I read through verses 22, 23 and 24? By the way, do you think you can change? Or would you say, "Listen, I've been handling conflict in my family wrong for 5 years, for 10 years, for 30 years, whatever it is and it's never going to change. Every time we have a conflict it's the same thing. Here we go around the mulberry bush, the mulberry bush, the mulberry bush." Do you want me to break out into song? ("No!") For Faith West folks, my son just put me in my place. All the Viars family is very healthy these days, I'm very thankful for that.

What were we talking about? Oh yeah, it doesn't have to be around the mulberry bush and around the mulberry bush, right? You can change. Do you believe that? In the power of God so it's not you can't teach old dogs new tricks. We're not talking about dogs and we're not talking about tricks and even if you would say, "I have been stuck in these patterns of conflict resolution that are just harmful and hurtful for decades," well, let's change it today, huh? Let's change it today.

You see the principles in verses 22, 23, 24, a step in each one of the principles that are in reference to your former manner of life. First, "you lay aside." There are certain things you have to put off. You have to stop doing that. You have to put that to death. Then, the second step in verse 23, "you be renewed in the spirit of your mind," in other words, you change your thinking. Then in verse 24, you "put on the new self." So the point is: in Scripture the way we change is by putting off and putting on. It's the principle of replacement in both the inner and the outer man and so we encourage folks to use a chart something like this: think about the specific area and try to be as precise and specific as you can, think about in order to change in that area, what is going to have to be put off and what is going to have to be put on.

So let's just pick one. Let's say that the area in which you need to change the most during times of conflict is you tend to speak in a harsh fashion. Well, in order to change that, you've got to identify it. So you have to sit back, turn off the television and think through, "Now, what are the patterns of thinking that lead to harsh speech? What's going on in my

heart, my desires, that lead to harsh speech? What's the behavior?" And you've got to decide with the help of God, "I'm going to put that to death. I'm going to stop that and I'm going to replace it with the opposite."

So again, let's just take harsh speech as an example. What's the thought process behind that? And if you say, "You know, I'm not sure I've ever taken the time to think about the thought processes behind the way I function in conflict resolution." Well, what do you think I'm going to tell you next? It's time to get with it. Christians are to be thoughtful people and we don't just change by some mystical zap. We've got to do our part.

So maybe during a time of conflict, the pattern, the rut in my road is believing my mean words are justified because the other person made me mad. Well, if you think that over and over and over, what do you need to do? You need to crucify that. You need to put it to death and, here's the beauty of it, you need to replace it with what's right. And you may even need to start writing down on some index cards your conflict resolution notes and one of them is: unkind words are never justified. So while you're sitting there listening to your honey, you're watching her, watching him, but you've got that card right in front of you: unkind words are never justified. Unkind words are never justified. Unkind words are never justified. You see, I'm going to break out into song again. So what happens is you're establishing a new pattern, in Christ you are establishing a new pattern.

You also need to ask yourself during a time of conflict: what do you want? And for some people they want to be mean. "I want to hurt the other person because I'm hurting." Well, what do you need to do with that desire? Crucify it. You've got to put that to death and do what? Replace it with what's right and you might have to write that down on your card too: I want to please God. Or: Spirit, help me want to please God. Then I'm going to change the behavior too. Speaking words that dishonor Christ and I'm going to replace that with speaking words that honor him.

Here's the principle: conflicts are to your sanctification what stress tests are to a piece of manufacturing equipment. Stress tests. You see, if you're building a piece of equipment, you want to put it under stress, why? To reveal the weaknesses. To reveal what needs to change. Conflict is the exact same for your sanctification. They reveal your weaknesses. They reveal the areas that need to be improved and get stronger. Friends, one of the reasons some of us may not be as far along in the growth process as we could or should be is, why? It's because we have not been good stewards of the personal sanctification opportunities that often rise to the top during a family feud so instead of growing we do or we say something, well, silly.

Game Show Host: Name something a woman does for her baby...?

Contestant: Changes his diaper.

Game Show Host: Changes his diaper.

[X]

Game Show Host: Name something a woman does for her baby that she also does for her hubby.

[Laughter]

I've got nothing. I've got nothing. But seriously now, why not, here's an idea, in fact, can I give homework before I flee the country? Why not ask your spouse or other family member to help you to complete a put-off/put-on chart of what tendencies are revealed in your life during a time of conflict that a sovereign God wants to see you change.

Also this, remember that conflict reveals important data about the nature of both your heart and your relationship with Christ. Isn't that right? A seminal text on that particular point is James 4:1, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" God knows about this. "Is not the source your pleasures," not the other person, your pleasures, "that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulteresses," wow, "do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?" Now, we could spend hours unpacking that passage alone but here's the point: for many of us, conflict is not nearly as productive as it could be because we're viewing it through the wrong lens and why not drive a stake right now in the ground that with the help of God you're going to come to conflicts first with a sincere desire to change yourself.

Now, this passage also helps us understand that the focus, not just the lens but the focus of conflict resolution, which is identifying grace-based solutions. Now look at verse 29. This illustrates that put-off/put-on principle that we saw earlier in the passages. Look for the put-off and the put-on here. "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." Well, there's the put-off and the put-on. What you shouldn't speak is unwholesome words. Now, when you first hear that you might say, "Well, Paul must be talking about avoiding profanity." Actually, that's not the case. We're against profanity, by the way, and we're encouraging Pastor Aucoin to try to stop but that's not what we're looking at here at all. Notice the contrast. For those over at Faith West, you know what I'm talking about. But anyway, the contrast is between unwholesome words and words that edify. Well, think about the contrast: we know what words that edify mean. Edify means, what? Build up. So unwholesome words are, what? Words that tear down or attack the other person. That's often what happens when you're frustrated or angry or maybe even deep down you know that you're at least partially at fault for what is occurring. The tendency is to speak words that hurt, that damage, that destroy which is why the Proverb says that, "A fool's lips bring strife." Could I get a mmm on that? "A fool's lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows. A fool's mouth is his ruin, And his lips are the snare of his soul."

You see, it's possible to speak words during a time of conflict that just tear down. They just destroy. They just create strife. And I think that one of the questions that all of us

could profitably ask this morning is: during a family feud, do you tend to speak words that are unwholesome? They hurt? They inflame strife? They tear the other person down? And I realize you might say in a moment of honesty, "But tearing the other person down is such an incredibly strong habit. I just default into that mode." Well, that might provide the perfect opportunity to consider whether you have a personal relationship with Christ or not. You understand that there are going to be persons who are going to hear this message today where their primary conflict is not with their spouse, their primary conflict is not with their kids, their primary conflict is with the God of heaven and earth even if they did not fully recognize that. And as a result, you can't put on the new life of verse 24 because you've not yet received that.

Do you want some good news? You say, "You just told me that I'm in conflict with God because he's holy and I'm sinful?" Here's the good news: what were we singing about earlier? Oh, the wonderful cross. God sent his Son to make it possible for you to lay down your arms, and God sent his Son making it possible for you to settle your conflict with a holy God by accepting his free gift of salvation provided through the shed blood of his Son. Friend, I would just say to you and one of the great things about 2015 so far has been just how many people have come to Christ and if you don't know that you know that you know that you know that you're on your way to heaven, why not let a discussion about conflict resolution in marriage be used by God to allow you to settle your conflict with the holy God of heaven through appropriating what his Son did on the cross to personally save you.

And Christian friend, this might be a great occasion to think through what it would be like for you to cry out for God's grace in a very real practical way. If you would say, "Just tearing the other person down, it is just so habitual," Well, think of our theme verse, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence," where? "To the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need." Can you think of a time of conflict in your family where you did just that? In fact, there might be some wisdom in during a time of argument, conflict in the home, calling for a grace break. Grace break. Maybe the husband would lead that or just anybody who happen to have his or her spiritual wits about them at the time, just say, "Time out. Could we just hold hands for a moment right now?" And for some of God's people you would have to unclench their fist. "Can we just hold hands for a minute? Let's just be quiet. Let's set ourselves down and let's draw near with confidence to the throne of grace and let's seek to receive mercy from God and let's find grace to help in our time of need." Grace breaks.

James said it like this, "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom." Some of us are smarter, at least we think, than gentle. In the gentleness of wisdom "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural," and what? Do we understand there are spiritual issues involved here? Do we understand that? "Demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then," what? "Peaceable, gentle." Just overlay your last conflict, "Peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits,

unwavering, without hypocrisy." And I realize you might say, "I can't do that because this problem makes me so mad." Do you realize based on the text we read earlier, that's a gift from God too intended to help you have energy to do this exact same thing but many of us waste that energy on something foolish, tearing someone else down. "The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But the mouth of fools spouts folly." Let's say we play the video of your last conflict and isolate it on what you said, would we have reason to say, "The mouth of fools spouts folly"? And sometimes what comes out makes us look incredibly silly, huh? Incredibly.

Game Show Host: Name an animal with 3 letters in its name?

1st Contestant: Frog.
[X]

Game Show Host: Turn around. You may never be up here again. Let's take a look.

Game Show Host: I'm going to ask you the same questions I asked the other Bob. You cannot and you do not want to duplicate his answers. Name an animal with 3 letters in its name.

2nd Contestant: Alligator.

Game Show Host: You don't use narcotics, do you Bob? I thought "frog" was a disastrous answer until you came up with "alligator." It's a real tough one, you know. "Dog" was the number 1 answer. Dog.

2nd Contestant: I'm sure it was.

Game Show Host: ...with 3 letters in its name. Dog. D-o-g.

Alligator. Alligator.

Well, what should you speak? What's the put-on here? The answer is: gracious words that actually build the other person up, good for edification even and perhaps especially during a time of conflict. You see, often a person walks away from a conflict concluding, "Did I never do anything right according to that person? Am I really that much of a disappointment?" And that doesn't mean that we ignore the problem but we do it in a balanced way, in a way that is timely, according to this passage, "according to the need of the moment." By the way, think about that: what generally is the need of the moment? Here's what I think the answer to that question would be: a clear delineation of the problem along with as many creative solutions to the problem as possible.

Friend, would you lock on to that? What is the need of the moment? It's for 2 people to join hands and calmly ask, "What really is the problem?" Delineate the problem and then let's use this angst and the energy that comes with it to together consider all the possible

solutions to that problem and one of the primary flaws with unwholesome words is they attack people instead of attacking problems. It ends up looking like this, here's a guy and his honey and not having a good day, you can see by the frowns. You can also see that that's a woman in the church house because of the length of that skirt. But anyway, they are mad at each other. They have a problem between them so he attacks her. Well, that hurts and so she attacks him. Well, that hurts and so he attacks her and she attacks him. Right about now we start bringing in the genealogies, mother-in-law's, they were just going at it. Bam. Bam. Bam. Then at about the 20 minute mark, you pause and say, "Now, what were we fighting about, again?" Because it's just these unwholesome words where we're just attacking, attacking, attacking and the point of this is we're getting further and further away from the problem, right? That's not what God wants. Here's what edifying words do: they acknowledge the problem for sure, you can see the sweet smile on these dear folks. Do you see how easy it is? Do you see how easy it is? But we're working together in order to find solutions to problems.

Also words that give something to the other person, "grace to those who hear." Here's a convicting question potentially: what does the person in conflict with me usually walk away with when the episode is over? A black eye? A bruised lip? A damaged soul? Or having received an additional helping of grace? Now, you might say, "Pastor Viars, this is just way beyond me. This is way beyond us." "It's not by might nor by power but by Spirit, saith the Lord" what is the power of conflict resolution? "Don't grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed until the day of redemption." Friends, what that means is in Christ you have access to supernatural power as you seek to solve conflicts well. Paul said it like this, "Now may the God of hope," do you have hope in this topic? "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing," why? "So that you will abound in hope," that's my goal for you this morning, "so that you will abound in hope by the," what? "Power of the Holy Spirit." Those are the kind of resources that were purchased for us at the wonderful cross.

It's interesting, do you know what the very next verse is in that particular argument? Problem solving. "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to," what? "Admonish one another." So the message here isn't just let's just be nice and avoid conflict. That's not going to get you anywhere. Problems are for solving but we can have the kind of confidence described in verse 14 because of the power and the hope of verse 13.

Please notice the way Paul ends this discussion. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." I think in some ways that's a double edged sword. On the one hand, we can't lose the Holy Spirit because of the efficacy of God's seal but on the other hand, we can certainly grieve him. Again, think about your most recent conflicts and ask the question: did I grieve the Holy Spirit of God? You see, perhaps one of the reasons many young people in our culture don't want to be married is because too many of God's people have spent too much time grieving the Holy Spirit and grieving everyone else within earshot. On the other hand, what a great

opportunity, huh? To shine the light of Christ in the culture in which we live by handling our conflicts well.

Would you stand with me for prayer?

Father in heaven, thank you for the powerful and practical nature of your word. And Lord, thank you that we sang before we started this message about the wonderful cross; we need the power and person of Christ to be able to handle this well. And Lord, I know that a number of different spiritual conditions were represented in this message as far as those who heard and, Lord, for those who don't know you, I pray that even now they would acknowledge their need and place their faith and trust in Christ. Lord, for those of us who need to spend some time just praying to you and coming to the throne of grace personally and confessing wrong habits during conflicts, I pray that we would do that, habits of the heart and habits of the mouth. Lord, if we need to go to a loved one and ask for forgiveness, to a husband, a wife, a child, a coworker, neighbor, whatever, Lord, would you give us the power to do that and would you help us to take the right step. And Lord, thank you, thank you that it's possible for us to change. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.